

ARTS

11-foot 'Floating Citadel' sculpture unveiled outside Detroit's Huntington Place

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Scott Hocking speaks during the unveiling of his sculpture "Floating Citadel" on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place. Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press

Detroit's newest public art installation was unveiled Wednesday evening in front of Huntington Place.

Detroit-based artist Scott Hocking's "Floating Citadel," a giant, globe-like structure made of bronze and spanning 11 feet in diameter, was debuted by the Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority (DRCFA) Art Foundation along with Mayor Mike Duggan, and dedicated to Larry Alexander, the first DRCFA chairman.

DRCFA Chair Lisa Canada said 75 artists responded to the foundation's initial call for submissions, and Hocking was ultimately selected for "his vision and creativity and his connection to arts in the city of Detroit."



Artist Scott Hocking along with Mayor Mike Duggan and others unveil his sculpture "Floating Citadel" on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place.



Artist Scott Hocking, left, speaks to Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan before the unveiling of his sculpture "Floating Citadel" on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place. Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press



Fellow artist and friend Saffell Gardner, left, congratulates Scott Hocking after the unveiling of Hocking's sculpture "Floating Citadel" Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place. Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press

Canada said Hocking's piece will be seen by more than 1.5 million visitors each year. It joins Huntington Place's public art collection alongside work by internationally respected, regional artists such as Hubert Massey, Robert Sestok, Tyree Guyton and Gilda Snowden, among others.

Hocking said his first meetings with the foundation began in March 2020, before the convention's center's latest renaming.

"At the time, it was the TCF Center," he recalled, "and even the material we were given was in folders that still said Cobo Hall. "Things have changed so much in such a short time — within weeks, the COVID lockdown happened."

The artist tapped into his love of history for inspiration in designing the sculpture, and referenced the Detroit River and its shoreline just beyond the walls of Huntington Place. He also compared the structure to a ribcage protecting a heart.

"I love the history of Detroit," he said. "I love digging through those layers of what was here before, and what it means to put something here now. We're within the original borders and fortifications of the city of Detroit when it was just a village, and right behind me was the

Citadel. The Citadel was like the defensive core of this village ... (which) led to making this piece that feels like this kind of protective, strong piece.



Scott Hocking sits adjacent to his sculpture "Floating Citadel" after it was unveiled on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place. Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press

“It’s made out of bronze, which is 90% copper. My ancestry were Cornish copper miners from the U.P.; the copper came down the waterway to make all the industry in Detroit. All those things factor in. I want to thank the city of Detroit. It’s been a constant inspiration my whole life — that’s why I’m still here.”

Duggan compared Hocking’s rise to the city’s “blight to beauty” efforts.

“Scott came to prominence going into abandoned buildings like the Fisher 21 Plant and the train station, and creating structures out of the debris was his original claim to fame,” Duggan said.

"Of course, it was only shared by those brave enough to violate the trespass laws to go, but the genius was recognized. ... When this city was going to have a symbol that would not be seen just by Detroiters, but visitors around the world coming here for conventions, I’m really proud of the fact they picked a great Detroit artist.”



Scott Hocking speaks during the unveiling of his sculpture "Floating Citadel" on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place. Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press

Alexander, who also served as CEO of the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau for more than 20 years, retired in 2020. From 2010 to 2019, during his time as chair of the DRCFA, the convention center grew revenue by 536%. His wife, Kitt, and daughter, Carson, beamed with dewy-eyed pride as he spoke after the sculpture's dedication.

"It's important," Alexander said, "to see the vision that Scott has put into this. His hands have formed this majestic, enduring, lifelong piece of art that will stand the test of time."

When "Floating Citadel" was unveiled, as if on cue, a single seagull swooped over the sculpture and squawked, drawing gasps and applause from the gathered crowd. It continued to circle the piece for some time after.

"I hope the seagulls like it," Hocking quipped.

Michigan-based lighting design firm Illuminart provided simple, elegant technology that will light the sculpture during nighttime hours. The company's senior lighting designer, Robert White, a College for Creative Studies alum, oversaw the project.



Musician Danny Kroha performs before Scott Hocking unveils his sculpture "Floating Citadel" on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place. Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press

“We kept it very, very simple,” he said. “It’s just ambient color and light. There’s a white ring of light around the base that’s just going to softly illuminate it from below. You’ve got to come back and see it at night.”

Hocking said the unveiling was his first time seeing the piece fully finished and installed.

“I’m still taking it all in, to be honest,” he said. “It’ll be nice when I can come on maybe a quiet day or at night. ... I’d like to see it at night. You know, I designed it so that it doesn’t really matter how the sun hits it. It’s going to create shadows. There’s also a natural patina of bronze that will keep aging. It’s going to look like the Statue of Liberty ... this kind of encrusted, protective layer that, over the years, will get a bit greener and bluer and have white streaks. I’m thrilled.

“I love seeing it here, right on Jefferson, with the Renaissance Center right there. It’s kind of mind-blowing, to be honest. It’s awesome.”

The unveiling comes as Huntington Place prepares to host the North American International Auto Show, which opens to the public Sept. 17 and runs through Sept. 25.



Lisa Canada, DRCFA Board Chair and DRCFA Art Foundation Chair speaks during the unveiling artist Scott Hocking's sculpture "Floating Citadel" on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place.



Former DRCFA Board Chair Larry Alexander speaks after the Scott Hocking sculpture "Floating Citadel" was dedicated to him on Aug. 17, 2022 in front of Huntington Place. Mandi Wright, Detroit Free Press

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